

An initiative for kids' health

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An IR View

It is entirely understandable for voters to grow weary of the steady biennial flood of ballot measures being promoted by various interests. For instance, there's one controversial initiative in the works that would make an embryo a legal person as of practically the twinkle in its father's eye.

There will be much uproar over an initiative aimed toward basically banning abortions. But State Auditor John Morrison's initiative to expand health insurance to more children is likely to be generally welcomed. After all, when kids do get born in Montana, why not do what's necessary to keep them healthy?

Morrison's measure expanding eligibility for the Children's Health Insurance Plan and Medicaid is designed to help as many as 30,000 Montana children currently without insurance. The initiative, somewhat revised from an earlier idea to mandate health insurance to all 37,000 children thought to be lacking health insurance, is being reviewed by state election officials and should be ready for signature gathering in a few weeks.

Morrison says the initiative, which would open CHIP to families earning up to 250 percent of the federal poverty level and Medicaid to families earning up to 185 percent of that level, could cost the state \$20 million a year, but could bring in some \$70 million in federal funds.

Gov. Brian Schweitzer has expressed concern about whether Congress will approve the additional federal funding. But the initiative ties the expanded eligibility to the state's ability to get those matching funds, so it's not as though the measure would commit the state to go it alone.

Montana's future depends most on the health and education of its youngest citizens. This initiative would seem to be a good step in the right direction.